

Needing to make room in my file drawer for the application papers of new candidates, I decided to remove the summer team folders. As I put the team members' papers in storage envelopes, it was with a feeling of sadness.

These young people had touched my life in a very special way. Their enthusiasm, compassion and willingness to give of their time and talents as hope-bearing gifts to hundreds of children blessed me. It was such a joy to train and prepare them for a summer of ministry with children longing for a touch, a hug, a sense of feeling important and being special to someone.

At the end of the summer, the ministries were thrilled with the terrific work that has been accomplished. The team members love and compassion for the children with whom they had worked just oozed out in their reports and their declarations to continue in ministries to children in crisis. In fact, everyone voluntarily signed the *Rainbows of Hope* Declaration that signified they were "committing my entire life to obeying His commission of Matthew 28:18-20, wherever and however He leads me"

Stephan, a Swiss short-termer to Russia, was the last summer worker to come home. He had made a trip to Finland to get an extension on his visa. Just one day before reopening of college, he managed to wrench himself away from the children who had become so precious to him through the summer. Stephan wrote: "Working with these children is the most fulfilling thing I ever did!" Oh, yes, Stephan is planning to visit the children again over the

Christmas holidays as a starter! And after graduating from college in the spring, Stephan will do his advanced studies in St. Petersburg so he can be near the children.

In Focus

Phyllis Kilbourn

Kristine, an elementary school teacher from Alaska, also comes to mind. She served in Zambia last summer among street child-ren, many orphaned through HIV/AIDS. When Melissa, a Canadian gal taking the WEC candidate orientation course, felt God calling her to serve in Zambia, Kristine was invited to go with her. Once Kristine was sure God had given her His seal of approval on the plans, there was no turning back. She sold her car, quit her job and prepared to serve with her beloved children once again. She can hardly believe God is giving her this great privilege.

Jamie, who spent her summer in the orphanage in Guatemala, gave such an inspiring report to the whole student body that they decided to send two teams of workers with Rainbows next summer! Everyone had exciting stories and challenges to share.

Now my file drawer is filling up with applications from more

young folk who want to work with children, many of them initially wanting a short-term experience of one or two years. Thirza is receiving the applications for those wanting to be involved in the next summer program. These young people will be heading to countries in Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe and Latin America. As I go through these papers, I pray that many, like Serena who went on a one-year assignment to Guatemala, will feel the call of God to full-time service.

So, listen up (as they say here in the South!) as Thirza challenges you to become a piece of the action in summer and short-term ministries. She has a lot of good arguments you can't refute! Now, take the plunge and let us know how you would like to become involved in not only blessing the children to whom you minister but, as Thirza points out, to also be an instrument of blessing to team members. How true it is that there are two agendas for these trips: what the team members plan to do AND what God plans to do in them through their experiences.

Sally sums up our desired long-term result for the young people on these teams when she stated, "I loved working with the people in Zambia. I now simply want to give my whole life to the Lord, lay it down at His feet, and be poured out for His purposes. I know that the Lord is preparing me for amazing things in my future and that is so exciting to me!"

Prayerfully read "More Harm than Good?" and see if God would have you play a role in developing young people who are "in process" in their response to the Great Commission.

More harm than good?

The place of short-termers with children-in-crisis ministry

Thirza Schoots

Short-term missions are taking the world by storm. The number of short-termers from the U.S.A. grew tenfold from 6,000 in 1975 to over 60,000 in 1987.¹ I wonder what the numbers are today. If they have grown tenfold again since 1987 then we could well have some 600,000 North Americans going out on short-term assignments today. That's a staggering amount. Statistics say that by the year 2000 short-termers will make up over 70 percent of all overseas personnel.

But what about short-termers in children in crisis ministry? Isn't that different? After all, this ministry involves children who have been hurt and who should not be hurt again. With this article, I would like to challenge you to reconsider short-term missions. If you have never thought about the possibility of having a short-term or a summer team coming to help in what you are doing, then let this article stimulate you to consider it. If you are excited about the possibilities short-term missions can offer your ministry, think again. Do short-termers cause more harm than good among children in crisis?

Who and what?

"How long are you going to stay?" The little boy looked at me with his large brown eyes as he asked me this question. I had been in Romania for a couple of

days and was keen to mingle with the street children I had met in Bucharest. His question caught me off-guard. I hesitated, but then told him honestly: "Sorry, I'm here for just a few weeks. Then I have to leave again." The boy simply nodded and walked away. Unlike most of his buddies, he did not give me his trust. He knew I would have to break that trust eventually. I would have to leave him again, like so many others before me, even his own mom and dad.

We all know who we are dealing with here. These are children who are living on the streets, who have seen the atrocities of war, who have lost their parents, siblings, friends, homes and every other imaginable security; children who have lost their innocence through the betrayal of trust and abuse inflicted upon them by gruesome adults. We know who the children are. But let me stop for a minute and define what I mean under short-term missions.

This article mainly addresses the various issues involved with summer teams. Made up of five to fifteen people, the majority of whom are below the age of 30, summer teams consist of people who have "sacrificed" their summer vacation for the sake of ministry abroad. They may stay from two to eight weeks and have very specific expectations of what they want to do. However, we need to also keep in mind the individual short-termers who may stay up to three years. Again, we

are speaking of a phenomenon that is booming among the younger generation (also called Generation X). These are the people who may no longer feel called to a particular country for life. They may feel called to missionary work for life, but most, initially, cannot and do not want to commit themselves to a particular field for more than a few years.

Not for the children

How can summer teams reach out to children in crisis? I dare to say they can't, not much anyway. Perhaps the question should be: How can they help you in your ministry? Or even: How can we help them? I know, that's taking it far, because missionaries have a lot to do as it is. You don't want another workload on your plate. You are not there to help "wanna-be missionaries." You're there to evangelize the lost and minister to the hurting at the same time. But what if you could help them in the process of them helping you?

Let's take first things first. No, I don't believe summer teams, in particular, should go out with their main objective being to help those "poor suffering children." Yes, they can hug and love them, play with them and tell them about their heavenly Father, but the summer missionary is not present when the going gets tough or when the children seriously

want to come off the streets. And the summer team member cannot even begin to understand the deep trauma a child of war or sexually exploited child has gone through, let alone solve that trauma by loving these children for a few weeks. I believe that children-in-crisis ministry is a career ministry which requires long-term, committed workers who will stick by these children through thick and thin and who are determined to see things through and lives changed no matter how long it takes. Children in crisis need people who will not give up on them if they blow it, again and again. Short-term missionaries who stay for at least one year can obviously provide more of this kind of ministry, but summer teams cannot, as much as they would like to.

So why bother with summer teams at all? Let me give you some examples why.

Specific things to do

One of our Rainbows of Hope summer teams this year went to Zambia. Their objective was to help at a school catering for 300 street children. They did much more than just play with the children. The school was drab, gray and sad-looking, so the team decided to paint some animals, rainbows and the letters of the alphabet on the walls. The local volunteers who were trying to teach these children were so overworked they could have never found the energy to even think of painting the building to make it look friendlier. This is where our summer team stepped in and served with lasting effects.

Another example: Just imagine how much good it would do if our next summer team to the Casa Bernabé orphanage in Guatemala could literally "replace" the house parents for a couple of weeks. These house parents have not had a proper vacation time away from the orphanage in years! Our team could give these parents a well-deserved break while at the same time ministering to the children.

So let me encourage you to think of specific things a summer team could do—things you simply do not have the time to do. Do you need your drop-in center painted? Or do you want to reach more poor children in your neighborhood or tell more street children about your ministry but simply don't have the people, time or resources to make that initial contact? Think summer team. Do remember, though, that the main objective of any short-termers is to help the children, therefore make sure they get to spend a considerable amount of time with the children and are not tied up in practical work all day.

Lice shampoo and other ministry

Short-termers could add generally to your ministry in many other ways. Remember that these people are willing to pay a lot of money, give up quite some time and interrupt their routine life because they are compelled with love for the children with whom you are working. That in itself is a valuable resource you can use. Only the Lord knows how much good a genuinely meant hug does to a child starving for affection. We know that the breaking of

that attachment will cause pain, but is that parting pain worth it, considering the showers of love the children get from short-termers? Only God knows, but we can hope so. In their interaction with the children, short-termers could have the privilege of leading a child to the Lord. You could have done that also, but God works out the perfect timing and place and a "new friend from another country" might be all it takes to open the child's eyes and heart to his or her heavenly Father and Savior.

Summer teams could also supply you with enough lice shampoo to last you for years! Not only can and will they bring things you need for your ministry, which may be hard to get where you are living, but they will also keep you in their minds when they return home. One of our summer team members this year took home the plans for new buildings the missionaries are planning to construct for the growing number of children they are catering to. "I will show this to my church and I'm sure, we will not only provide enough funds to get the construction going, but we will even send a team to do the construction over there!"

It's too much work!

Before I explain your part in all of this, we need to focus on the drawbacks of summer teams in children in crisis. "I love them, but they wear me out. I'm continually mopping spills, picking up soda cans and glasses, wiping wet spots off my furniture, and picking up towels," one missionary said after hosting a

missions team. Yes, a bunch of know-it-all, bursting-with-energy young people in a summer team are a lot of work, we have to be honest. However, you can make the experience better, depending on how you handle them (see a list of tips later). Also remember that all teams receive pre-field training and are accompanied by experienced leaders who will be responsible for most of the practical work to do with the teams.

It hurts!

During my time in Romania one twelve-year-old boy had grown particularly fond of me. In an attempt to keep him warm, I had held Nicolae tight when we found him without a shirt or top in chilly weather. I guess that was a genuine bonding experience for him. When the time came to say goodbye, big tears streamed down his face and he held onto my hand with both his hands and all his force. As I gently tried to pull his hands off my hand, his was not the only heart that broke. We could only get him to let go of me by force and as I walked away I cried. Not a pleasant, rosy situation. Life is just not fair and we both felt it strong on that day. I had to betray his trust. I was yet another person walking out of his life, perhaps never to see him again. Oh yes, I had told him time and time again that I would be leaving, but for a child who is desperate to be loved that phrase often meets closed ears. He doesn't want to know because, in his dream world, you'll be there to take care of him forever.

We cannot glamorize summer missions in the field of children

in crisis. It's not all wonderful and perfect. Hearts get broken, again. Trust gets betrayed, again. For this reason all short-termers, at least three weeks before departure, have to try in every way possible to make sure bonds and attachments get transferred to the person who stays, local or missionary.* Still, we cannot prevent hurt from happening completely. Meanwhile, we have to hope that our short impact with the showers of love, the practical help and the living presentation of the gospel did more good than harm.

Your ministry

So where does your help come in? I believe that the people who receive the most ministry are the short-termers themselves. Lives are changed beyond recognition on a short-term mission. "The

key to igniting volunteers to become world Christians is found in one word: experience," says Jim Burns, President of the National Institute of Youth Ministry. Short-term missions are the *gateway* to career missionary service. Statistics say that about one quarter of all short-termers go again, long-term. I believe that the remaining percentage will have had at least an extraordinary encounter with God and/or will keep the mission task deeply embedded in their hearts and serve as senders or simply as God's people who pray for the mission work to be completed. That's definitely one very good reason to consider hosting short-termers.

¹ Douglas Millham of Discover the World, Inc.

* This is one reason *Rainbows of Hope* does not send out short-termers for under one year except for the summer teams.

OK, but how?

Tips on how to survive summer teams

1. Think of specific things for them to do.
2. Combine relational ministry with physical labor.
3. Discuss expectations with the team leader.
4. Give the team background information on the country, the ministry, the children, you.
5. Upon their arrival, do an orientation session with them to address important issues.
6. Remind them to transfer attachments to the long-term workers and to tell the kids that they are there for a short time only.
7. How much do you want to invest? What about doing some training sessions with them based on your experiences?
8. Communicate rules very clearly.
9. Be flexible, patient and accepting.
10. Don't take things personally, but do take things with humor.